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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine the attitudes of teachers and students toward a program of uninterrupted sustained silent reading (USSR) operating in their school. The 14 teachers and 136 students in grades three through six were questioned about their attitudes toward the program. Teachers were also asked for opinions about USSR's effect on student achievement, perceptions of students' reading habits, and whether a relationship existed between students' interest in USSR and reading ability. The responses indicated that 84% of the students said they read most or all of the time during USSR periods. Only 2.3% said they did not read. A comparable percentage of teachers read during most or all of the USSR periods. Most teachers and students agreed that their room was usually quiet during USSR periods. The teachers felt that students had increased their reading since the program was initiated, with 58% reporting that their students read a lot more. None felt that their students' reading habits had remained unchanged. Most of the students who perceived a change in their reading habits were in the fourth grade, where nearly half said they read a lot more since the program began. In the sixth grade, 75% of the boys and 50% of the girls said their reading habits had not changed since the program began. The results also indicated overwhelming support for keeping USSR in the school's reading program. (HTH)

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Student and Teacher Attitudes Toward Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading

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Introduction

Teachers have been consistently blamed for lowered standardized test scores. Usually the score that is of most concern is reading. "Why Johnny Can't Read" and "Why Johnny Still Can't Read" by Rudolph Flesch are just two expressions of this outrage.

In an attempt to encourage increased recreational reading which should improve one's verbal expression as well as knowledge, many teachers nationwide are using the Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR) program, also called Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) or High Intensity Practice (HIP).

SSR calls for a specified period of time each day when students and the teacher silently read the material of their choice. Anything in print is allowable -- magazines, newspapers, pocketbooks, texts. The importance of reading is further enhanced if SSR is a schoolwide practice rather than just a classroom activity. Students cannot help feeling that reading must be important if the principal, custodians, cooks, etc., all take time from their work on a regular basis to participate in the SSR activity with the rest of the school.

Reading is taught daily in schools, but rarely practiced. "Some have suggested that the ratio should be as high as 80% practice to 20% instruction." (Mork, 1972, p. 440) Skills being taught are practiced in workbooks as isolated activities. Groups read orally, but this is a threatening situation, especially for poorer readers, and often a futile activity. Plus, almost

everything that is read is teacher-selected.

SSR practices all reading skills. Students are allowed to choose what they want to read -- something for fun and something in which they are truly interested. Because it is silent reading, students are freed from embarassment of mistakes made before peers, and they are not required to read every word perfectly or remember every detail. No one is monitoring the pace at which a student reads, so he can slow down, speed up or skip certain passages. SSR develops an interest in reading, and subsequently enhances achievement. "It seems logical...to accept SSR (rather than some other activity) as a more natural form of practice since it involves the total act of reading." (Moore, Jones and Miller, 1980, p. 449) Using this teaching method should improve one's concentration and attention to task which is useful in all subjects. Students become more responsible and more mature in their choice of reading material. They are comfortable with printed material and may even use the library more often.

At Ursa Major Elementary School in Anchorage, Alaska, SSR is an integral part of the reading/language arts program. From Monday through Thursday, each teacher individually fits SSR daily into the two hour language arts period when it is convenient to the rest of the lesson. On Friday the entire school including secretaries and other support staff practice SSR from 2:30 until 3:00. Parents are asked not to call the school at this time

because everyone is reading, and reading materials are available in the office for any visitors to the school.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes toward USSR of teachers and third, fourth, fifth and sixth graders at the Ursa Major Elementary School, Anchorage, Alaska, where USSR is in its second year.

Definitions of Terms

HIP = High Intensity Practice, includes SSR, SSW and SSA, names by Marvin Oliver of Eastern Washington State College

SSA = Self-Selected Activities

SSR = Sustained Silent Reading, named by Robert McCracken of Western Washington State College

SSW = Sustained Silent Writing

USSR = Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading, named by Lyman Hunt of the University of Vermont

Review of Related Literature

Many people feel the current classroom reading programs are not doing their job. Teachers tend to accentuate the negative aspects of reading by counting and correcting errors children make, thereby making the child nervous and frustrated about reading. Reading lessons rarely have children read. The tasks involved are decoding through round-robin reading, followed by seatwork reinforcement worksheets. (Allington, 1977; Hunt, 1970; Sadoski, 1980A) SSR programs provide "...time for students to enjoy reading as a holistic and recreational language activity besides its being treated as a hierarchical learning task." (Sadoski, 1980A, p. 721)

Although teachers have traditionally had children reading silently, Lyman Hunt has been credited with structuring the practice and naming it Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading. "USSR is the essence of reading power; the ability to keep going with ideas in print. Without it the reader is crippled; with the power of sustained silent reading the reader is on his own, he can propell himself through print." (Hunt, 1970, p. 150) Robert McCracken shortened the acronym to SSR because of sensitivity to USSR.

Noland (1976), Mork (1972), Schardt (1983) and Maynes (1982) feel that reading is overtaught and underpracticed. Noland further suggests that contextual reading is more important than skills of recognition at the word-letter level. Teachers need to

emphasize meaning more than decoding, and silent reading should be developed before oral reading. "If schools are to develop independent readers who will read for information and enjoyment, children must be taught independence in book selection, setting purposes for reading, and in applying skills to the learning task. Such independence of purpose and practice can only be accomplished when control is surrendered to the learner." (Oliver, 1976, p. 228)

Allington (1975), Gambrell (1978, McCracken (1978), Moore, Jones and Miller (1980), and Berglund and Johns (1983) feel advance publicity is the way to initiate the program effectively. Posters, bulletin boards and announcements over the public address system should herald the arrival of SSR. Many different types of reading materials should be available: newspapers, magazines, comic books and pupil-produced books. Old basal readers and content area textbooks can be cut apart to make individual stories. (Gambrell, 1978; Moore, Jones and Miller, 1980, Berglund and Johns, 1983; Schaudt, 1983)

Hong (1981) indicates that the initial reading period should be one to five minutes, depending upon the age and ability of the readers. Then it should be increased gradually as children sustain their silent reading to fifteen minutes or more. In a study by Oliver (1976) where students were divided into groups according to scores on the Gates-McGinitie reading test, students in the high group wanted at least thirty minutes; pupils in the

low group felt twenty minutes would be sufficient.

"He (child) can best demonstrate this skill (ability to read independently) when he is given time to read under conditions that make reading the only acceptable activity in the classroom." (Oliver, 1976, p. 228) The classroom should be quiet and everyone, including the teacher, reads. The importance of modeling by the teacher cannot be overemphasized. Students will imitate teachers who read and who are enthusiastic about the program. (McCracken, 1978; Gambrell, 1978; Berglund and Johns, 1983)

The research concerning attitude change toward reading is mixed. Harvey (1974) and Summers (1979) reported no effect on attitude or achievement. Einhorn (1979) saw no significant difference in attitude or the amount of independent reading. Mikulecky and Wolf (1977) found a slight decline in positive reading attitude among seventh graders, but less of a decline was attributed to SSR than to two other self-selected reading activities. In a major portion of the research studies examined, Hunt (1970), Oliver (1976), Langford (1979), Sadoski (1980A and 1980B), Moore, Jones and Miller (1980), Hong (1981), Maynes (1982), and Berglund and Johns (1983) found SSR created a positive attitude in students toward reading. "SSR helps to achieve a major goal of the school experience; it aids in developing attitudes and habits conducive to a lifetime of reading for enjoyment and learning." (Moore, Jones and Miller, 1980, p. 449)

A fifth grade teacher reported, "For the first time I can remember pupils in my class are disappointed when they have to stop reading. They want to read and read and read." (Mork, 1972, p. 441) A study by LaBrant in 1936 showed significant increases in reading maturity when students were consistently given "quiet time to read" during the school day. A study of this same sample twenty-five years later still showed these adults as motivated and active readers.

Changes in reading ability based on achievement tests are harder to find. Phau (1969) found positive differences on first and second graders' achievement scores, but questioned the results based on the fact that during these grades, the major curriculum emphasis is reading and SSR may not have been the contributing factor to the gains. Moore, Jones and Miller (1980) noted a positive effect on reading ability when SSR was combined with a regular program of reading instruction. Evans and Towner (1975), Oliver (1976) and Reed (1977) found no difference in reading achievement scores on the samples tested.

There is a need for more long term studies relating SSR to score changes on reading achievement tests. (Evans and Towner, 1975; Oliver, 1976; Sadoski, 1980A and 1980B; Cline, 1980; Moore, Jones and Miller, 1980; Maynes, 1982) The research examined was conducted over periods of a few weeks to a few months. No long term studies were available. In the midst of this, Coughlin cautions us to "...refrain from the urge...to look for a correla-

tion between increased SSR time and improvement on reading test scores." (Moore, Jones and Miller, 1980, p. 449)

Method

This study examined attitudes toward USSR of classroom teachers and students in grades three through six at Ursa Major Elementary School. These subjects were chosen because USSR has been part of the reading program for two years.

The reading program at Ursa Major includes: 1) Holt basal reading text, 2) language experience, 3) reading contracts with parents who supervise recreational reading for ten minutes per day four days per week, reading aloud to primary youngsters, and keeping track of the number of pages read, and 4) USSR. This program is predicated on three phases of reading advocated by Dr. Ruel Allred of Brigham Young University (1983): 1) the developmental phase - learning to read; 2) the functional phase - reading to learn; and 3) the recreational phase - loving to read.

From Monday through Thursday each teacher schedules daily periods of USSR during the language arts period whenever it is compatible with other activities for that day. In the primary grades where children cannot read, the children either look at picture books and/or the teacher reads to them. On Friday the entire school including the principal, secretary, librarian, custodian and visitors to the school read from 2:30 until 3:00. Parents are discouraged from calling the school at this time on Friday. Not only does this practice have everyone reading, but it emphasizes the importance of reading.

Subjects

Ursa Major Elementary School is located on Fort Richardson army base. There are 406 students currently enrolled in the school from kindergarten through grade six, including two special education classes. Ursa Major is a neighborhood school. Because of military rotation, approximately 28 percent of the student population changes during the course of a school year. Sixty-eight percent of the families are on free or reduced price lunch programs. English is the second language in one-fourth of the homes. (Denslow, 1983)

The entire teaching staff was polled and all students in grades three through six were questioned about their attitudes toward SSR.

Instrument

Two questionnaires (copies in appendix), adapted from attitude surveys conducted by Sadoski (1980A) and Tetroe (1980), were devised to examine attitudes toward USSR. The content of the questions on both surveys was similar, requesting information on preparation for USSR periods, attitude toward USSR, attitude toward reading, personal reading habits, reading interest at Ursa Major, and the continuation of USSR. In addition, teachers were asked for opinions about USSR's affect on student achievement, perceptions of students' reading habits, and whether or not a relationship exists between student interest in USSR and reading ability.

The student questionnaire was a one page (8½x11", both sides) instrument of 14 questions. The teacher questionnaire was a one page (8½x11", both sides) instrument of 22 questions. Both surveys required structured and open-ended answers.

Procedure

This study investigated the attitudes of teachers and students toward USSR at Ursa Major Elementary School. After the review of related literature was completed, a student survey and a teacher survey were developed. (copies in appendix) The student questionnaires were read aloud by this researcher in six classrooms: two third grades, one fourth grade, one fourth/fifth grade combination, one fifth grade and one fifth/sixth grade combination. A total of 136 student questions were completed. The purpose of the study was explained and the teacher questionnaires were distributed by the principal of Ursa Major. A total of 14 teacher questionnaires were completed. Due to the method of administration, all questionnaires were returned upon completion. The responses to the attitude surveys were tabulated and analyzed.

Results

In order to assess teacher and student attitudes toward USSR at Ursa Major Elementary, two questionnaire surveys were designed and administered. (copies of the questionnaires are in the appendix) This researcher read the student survey to one hundred thirty-six (136) boys and girls in grades 3 through 6. (see Table 1) The principal at Ursa Major distributed and collected the teacher questionnaires. Fourteen teacher surveys were returned.

Table 1: Student Sample from Ursa Major

	Boys	Girls	Total
Grades 3	27	20	47
4	19	21	40
5	16	15	31
6	8	10	18
Total	70	66	136

Of the students questioned, only five or 3.7 percent knew that the acronym USSR meant Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading, although all of the students knew it meant quiet reading time because the terms "silent reading" or "recreational reading" are used instead of the acronym. As the questions on the survey were read, the words "or silent reading time" were inserted where appropriate after the acronym.

When asked about what they do during USSR periods, 84.4% of the students said they read most or all of the time. Only 2.3% said they do not read. (see Table 2)

Table 2. What do you do during USSR periods

	Grade 3	4	5	6	Total	Percent
Do not read	2	1	0	0	3	2.3%
Read some times	6	4	4	4	18	13.3%
Read most times	14	12	8	4	38	28.1%
Read all times	25	23	19	9	76	56.3%

Research substantiates that USSR will be most effective if the teacher models the appropriate behavior. (Berglund and Johns, 1983; Gambrell, 1978; McCracken, 1978) So teachers were questioned about their behavior during USSR periods. Data obtained from teachers was quite similar to data obtained from students: a comparable number of teachers read most or all of tne USSR periods -- 78.6% for teachers; 84.4% for students. (see Tables 2 and 3) The three teachers or 21.4% who do not read most or all of the time are working with individual students on a one-to-one basis or monitoring the classroom.

Table 3. To what extent do you participate in USSR?

	TCH	PERCENT
Do not read	1	7.1%
Read some times	2	14.3%
Read most times	7	50.0%
Read all times	4	28.6%

Both students and teachers were surveyed about the noise level in the classroom during USSR periods. Most teachers and students agree that their room is usually quiet. (see Table 4)

Table 4: During the USSR periods is your room usually:

Grade	3	4	5	6	Total		TCH	
Too noisy	0	0	1	0	1	.7%	1	7.2%
A bit noisy	11	12	10	11	44	32.4%	6	42.8%
Quiet	36	28	20	7	91	66.9%	7	50.0%

USSR has been found to develop attitudes and habits conducive to continued reading throughout a person's lifetime. (Moore,

Jones and Miller, 1980) The purpose of this paper was to examine such attitudes. Students seemed evenly divided about the change in their reading habits. (see Table 5) Teachers felt that students had increased their reading habits since USSR was initiated with 58.3% of the teachers reporting that their students read a lot more. No teacher felt that his/her students' reading habits did not change. (see Table 6)

Table 5: Did your reading habits increase because of USSR?

Grade	3	4	5	6	Total	
No change	7	12	9	11	39	29.1%
Read a little more	23	7	11	2	43	32.1%
Read a lot more	16	21	10	5	52	38.8%

Table 6: To what extent do you think reading habits have increased as a result of USSR?

	TCH	
No change	0	0.0%
Students read a little more	5	41.7%
Students read a lot more	7	58.3%

The greatest number of students who perceived a change in their reading habits was in the fourth grade where 57.9% of the boys and 47.7% of the girls said they read a lot more since USSR. In the sixth grade 75% of the boys and 50% of the girls said their reading habits did not change since USSR was started at Ursa Major.

Similarly, school-wide attitudes toward reading since the inception of USSR were examined. Over 90% of the students and teachers have seen changes in reading habits at Ursa Major since USSR has been in practice. (see Tables 7 and 8)

Table 7: Do you feel that USSR increased the interest in reading at Ursa Major?

Grade	3	4	5	6	Total	
No Change	4	3	3	3	13	9.6%
Some more interest	22	12	14	9	57	42.2%
A lot more interest	21	25	13	6	65	48.2%

Table 8: Do you feel USSR has increased interest in reading at Ursa Major?

	TCH	
No change	1	8.3%
Some more interest	5	41.7%
A lot more interest	6	50.0%

Students were asked if they read at home when they had free time. Two thirds or 66.6% of the students polled read at home. More girls (57.8%) than boys (42.2%) read at home. Fifty-eight percent of all students polled said they read in school when they finished their work or had free time. Again, more girls (60.8%) than boys (39.2%) read at school when they had free time.

Should USSR be continued? The results of this survey overwhelmingly conclude that USSR should be part of the reading program at Ursa Major. All of the teachers and 87.4% of the students want to see the practice continue. (see Table 9)

Table 9: Do you want USSR to continue?

Grade	3	4	5	6	Total		TCH	
Yes	39	34	29	16	118	87.4%	13	100%
No	7	6	2	2	17	12.6%	0	0%

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the results of the questionnaire surveys administered to teachers and third through sixth graders at Ursa Major Elementary School, Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR) is an effective technique for improving student attitudes toward reading. Not only are students reading more at Ursa Major, they are reading more often. Many reading specialists, notably Lyman Hunt (1970) and Frank Smith (1978), feel the best way to have children improve their reading is to practice. USSR provides practice. As indicated by both teachers and students, USSR should be continued at Ursa Major.

Teachers at Ursa Major felt that USSR has affected their students' achievement in reading. No conclusive test evidence of this is available at this time, but the principal hypothesizes that spring '84 scores on the reading subtest of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills will be significantly improved when compared with fall '82 scores and that USSR will have contributed to this improvement. Research investigating whether USSR does or does not significantly affect achievement in reading is warranted.

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APPENDIX

Student Survey

Please answer the following questions. Where a choice is given, circle the letter of your answer.

1. I am a: a) girl b) boy

2. I am in grade: a) 3 b) 4 c) 5 d) 6

3. What is USSR? _____

4. What do you do during USSR periods?
   a) I do not read.
   b) I read some of the time.
   c) I read most of the time.
   d) I read all the time.

5. Do you have your book(s) ready before USSR begins?
   a) Never
   b) Sometimes
   c) Usually
   d) Always

6. When you have free time at school, do you read?
   a) Yes b) No How many minutes? _____

7. When you have free time at home, do you read?
   a) Yes b) No How many minutes? _____

8. During the USSR periods is your room usually:
   a) too noisy to read
   b) a bit noisy
   c) quiet

9. Did your reading habits increase because of USSR? (For example, did you start to read a book during the USSR period and finish it latter?)
   a) My reading habits did not change.
   b) I read a little more now than before USSR.
   c) I read a lot more now than before USSR.

10. Do you feel that USSR increase the interest in reading at Ursa Major?
    a) There is no more interest in reading now than before USSR.
    b) There is some more interest in reading now than before USSR.
    c) There is a lot more interest in reading now than before USSR.

11. What kind of books do you like to read? _____

_____

12. How do you feel about USSR?
    a) USSR is boring.
    b) USSR is o.k.
    c) USSR is fun.

13. Do you want USSR to continue?
    a) Yes b) No

14. Do you have any comments about USSR? Please write them here.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Teacher Survey

Please answer the following questions. Where a choice is given, circle the letter of your answer.

1. Sex: a) Male b) Female

2. I teach grade _____.

3. To what extent do you participate in USSR?
   a) I do not read.
   b) I read some of the time.
   c) I read most of the time.
   d) I read all the time.

4. Do your students have their books selected before USSR begins?
   a) Never
   b) Sometimes
   c) Usually
   d) Always

5. During the USSR periods is your room usually:
   a) too noisy to read
   b) a bit noisy
   c) quiet

6. Where do your students read during USSR?
   a) at their desks
   b) on the floor
   c) other_____

7. How did you prepare your students for USSR in the beginning of the year?_____
   _____

8. How do you demonstrate how valuable recreational reading is?
   _____

9. Have parents asked questions or made any comments about USSR?
   a) Yes b) No What?_____
   _____

10. Would you like to see USSR continued?
    a) Yes b) No

11. To what extent do you think reading habits have increased as a result of USSR? (For example, do students want to continue to read at the end of the USSR period?)
    a) Reading habits did not change
    b) Students read a little more now than before USSR.
    c) Students read a lot more now than before USSR.

12. Do you feel USSR has increased interest in reading at Ursa Major?
    a) There is no more interest in reading now than before USSR.
    b) There is some more interest in reading now than before USSR.
    c) There is a lot more interest in reading now than before USSR.

13. Do you think USSR has affected your students' achievement in reading? a) Yes b) No How?_____
    _____

14. Do students want to read when they finish their regular work?
    a) Yes b) No

15. Are your students allowed to read after they finish their regular work? a) Yes b) No

16. Do you observe your students reading during their free time?
    a) Yes b) No

17. In your opinion is a student's interest in USSR related to his reading ability? a) Yes b) No How?_____
    _____

18. What percent of your students read during USSR periods?_____

19. Have your reading habits changed since USSR has been stressed and time has been provided for reading?
    a) There has been no change in my reading habits.
    b) I read a little more now than before USSR.
    c) I read a lot more now than before USSR.

20. Do you share what you read with your students?
    a) Yes b) No Why not?_____
    _____

21. What kind of books do you read?_____
    _____

22. Additional comments you have about USSR._____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____